

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

THOMAS HARDY

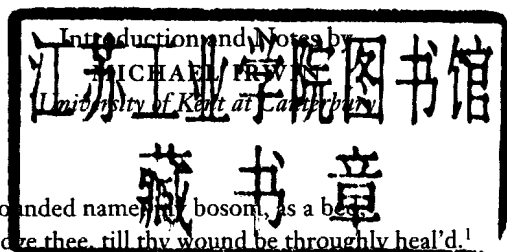


COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

TESS OF D'URBERVILLES

A Pure Woman

Thomas Hardy



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

In loving memory of
MICHAEL TRAYLER
the founder of Wordsworth Editions

8

Readers who are interested in other titles from
Wordsworth Editions are invited to visit our website at
www.wordsworth-editions.com

For our latest list and a full mail-order service contact
Bibliophile Books, 5 Thomas Road, London E14 7BN
TEL: +44 (0)20 7515 9222 FAX: +44 (0)20 7538 4115
E-MAIL: orders@bibliophilebooks.com

First published in 1993 by Wordsworth Editions Limited
8B East Street, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9ET
New introduction and notes added in 2000

ISBN 978-1-85326-005-6

Text © Wordsworth Editions Limited 1993
Introduction and notes © Michael Irwin 2000

Wordsworth® is a registered trade mark of
Wordsworth Editions Limited

All rights reserved. This publication may not be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or
transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publishers.

Typeset by Antony Gray
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

General Adviser

KEITH CARABINE

Rutherford College

University of Kent at Canterbury

INTRODUCTION

There's a sense in which *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, to invoke a cliché, 'needs no introduction'. Here is a novel wonderfully easy to enjoy: it is rare for a great work of literature to charge so small an entry fee. Readers who know nothing of Hardy or the history of fiction can be drawn into it in two pages, to find themselves absorbed and moved. But there is far more to this work than meets the casual eye: the further it is explored the more it offers. First published in 1891, *Tess* is situated on certain crucial boundary lines. In terms of literary history it looks both forward and back. Although often, and understandably, read as a realist novel in the best Victorian tradition, it also anticipates many of the fictional experiments of the century ahead. Hardy has as much in common with Joyce and Lawrence as with Dickens and George Eliot. The traditional elements of the story can well deflect attention from this modernity. In the context of Hardy's own career,

Tess was again near a turning point. As a young man Hardy had hoped to become a poet. He turned to fiction only when his verses had repeatedly been rejected by publishers. By the time he wrote *Tess* he was past fifty, and well established in his storytelling craft: this was his twelfth novel. But he was to publish only two more, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Well-Beloved*, before abandoning fiction altogether and devoting himself wholeheartedly to verse. This second career was to flourish: he had produced a thousand poems and earned a new reputation by the time of his death in 1928. There is a sense in which *Tess* is a hybrid: everywhere the poet is speaking through the fiction. To enjoy the work merely as a novel is therefore to under-read it, even to misread it.

I

It may be helpful, however, to approach these more complex conclusions by way of simplicities. *Tess* is a work of wonderful narrative energy. It first appeared in the magazine *The Graphic*, in illustrated weekly instalments, appealing to a popular readership. Behind it lay Hardy's many years of experience in that mode of publication. The serial form imposes awkward conditions on the writer. A story capable of holding the interest of a large audience over a period of months must be lively, purposeful and relatively uncomplicated. It must begin briskly to command attention. Exciting or entertaining episodes must be evenly distributed, so that no one instalment will fall flat. Ideally each 'number' should end on a note of suspense, pointing the reader forward. Hardy was accustomed to these demands and knew how to meet them. It came naturally to him to deal in striking, self-contained, powerfully-visualised episodes no more than a chapter in length. Probably most readers of Hardy recall his work in terms of such scenes. To think of *Tess* is to remember, for example, the death of Prince, the dance at Trantridge, the baptism of Sorrow, the harp-playing, the fording of the flooded road, the threshing at Flintcomb Ash, dawn at Stonehenge.

Hardy was always a brilliant *starter* of a novel. None of his great contemporaries was so consistently quick off the mark. But such momentum is not easy to sustain. Of all Victorian novels perhaps *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Great Expectations* start most explosively, but each has then to ease to a slower pace while further foundations are laid for the narrative to follow. The crisp opening of *Tess*, by contrast, is brilliantly contrived to initiate a *sequence*. Parson Tringham tells Durbeyfield, a seedy village carrier, that he is

descended from knightly stock. The delighted aristocrat celebrates his newly discovered status late into the night at the local alehouse, from which his daughter, Tess, is obliged to retrieve him. Since the drinking has left him incapable, Tess herself is obliged to drive the waggon for him next day. Having had less than three hours' sleep she dozes off, with the result that the family's horse, their means of livelihood, is killed in a collision. Because Tess feels responsible for the accident, deeming herself almost 'a murderess', she reluctantly accedes to her mother's plan that she should go to 'claim kin' with the rich d'Urberville family, now assumed to be relatives. Her visit eventually leads to seduction by Alec and pregnancy. The swift succession of events takes the reader through to the end of the second 'Phase' of the story, which is directly followed by the pendulum swing from Alec to Angel, from the realm of the flesh to the realm of the spirit. Not only has the narrative progressed at exhilarating pace, through a series of logical steps, but Hardy has been able to set up the thematic contrast that lies at the heart of his conception, and to illustrate his belief that important and even tragic events can derive from the most trivial of causes.

It was a wonderful thing that Hardy, like Dickens before him, could so readily adapt his creative genius to the requirements of a popular medium and even, perhaps, profit from them. But there could be a price to pay for this compromise, and in the case of *Tess* it was a heavy one. The magazines in which such serialisations appeared were aimed at a family audience, assumed to be highly susceptible to moral shock. A number of times in his career Hardy had been asked to omit or to modify this or that detail lest his readers should be upset. The problems posed by *Tess* proved far more serious. Three publishers rejected the manuscript as containing elements which might cause offence. Only after pruning and radically revising the text could Hardy get it serialised in *The Graphic*. The most notable change deformed the whole project. In this version Tess is not seduced by Alec, but is instead tricked into a bogus marriage. Chapters x and xi and the baptism scene, all omitted from the serialisation, were published separately, as isolated sketches, in other magazines. Only in the hard-cover edition of 1891 was Hardy able to set about reassembling his story as originally conceived.

In a sense the fears of those who rejected the manuscript were shown to be justified. Certainly *Tess* won generous praise, but it was also attacked in some quarters, Hardy being called (in the *Quarterly Review*) 'a novelist who, in his own interests, has gratuitously chosen to tell a coarse and disagreeable story in a coarse and disagreeable

manner'. His decision to sub-title the work 'A Pure Woman' had been a calculated venture into an ethical minefield. The literature and even the painting of the Victorian period had often reflected upon the plight, the relative guilt and the likely fate of 'the fallen woman'. While many would have been prepared to contemplate the possibility of forgiveness in such circumstances, exculpation was a different matter. Hard-line moralists proved only too willing to reject the proposed defence of Tess's conduct. 'We cannot for a moment admit,' proclaimed R. H. Hutton, in *The Spectator*, 'that . . . Tess acted as a pure woman should have acted under such a stress of temptation'.

A hundred years on, such comments seem smugly naïve; but the sub-title probably continues to do Hardy a disservice, in that it tends to confine discussion of the novel to the level of social realism. No serious critic is likely to argue that Tess is, after all, 'guilty', but very many choose to concentrate on social and gender issues, to pursue above all such questions as 'Who is responsible for Tess's downfall?' 'How morally and sexually enlightened does Hardy show himself to be?' 'How fair is *he* to his unfortunate heroine?' In a curious back-handed compliment to Hardy's powers of character-creation, some feminist critics, in particular, have represented Tess as in effect an independent being, variously vulnerable to the harshness, the voyeurism, the prurience or even the sexual assaults of her creator.

Arguably Hardy himself invited the moral protest – and not merely by the challenge implied in his sub-title. He repeatedly relates Tess's predicament to the known Victorian world and its harsh judgement of what was deemed sexual impropriety in women. Innocent in the eyes of nature, Tess 'had been made to break an accepted social law . . .' (p. 76). Angel is willing to accept the sexual double standard because, despite his attempts to achieve 'independence of judgement' he is nevertheless 'the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings' (p. 232). The social points are there to be made, and Hardy specifically chooses to make them.

Yet despite this challenging editorial slant the narrative rarely shows the 'fallen' Tess suffering in a purely social sense. The 'society' in which she moves is not censorious. Her family accept her again without demur, and her fellow workers in her native village in general treat her with kindness and even tact. Poverty itself need not have been an issue in that both Alec and Clare at various times promise her all the financial help she is likely to need. It is Tess herself who chooses to reject these offers in whole or in part. The pains she endures derive partly from Alec's lust and from the moral rigidities of Angel Clare, but partly also from her own

beliefs and despairs – very little from condemnation by ‘society’.

To discuss *Tess* in terms of moral responsibility, whether social or individual, is tacitly to identify it as a realist novel with a marked psychological interest. Certainly the first reviewers typically chose to summarise the plot and talk about the characterisation as though this was the natural way into the work. Yet the fact is that such an approach yields only moderate returns. Three characters dominate the narrative. Of these Alec d’Urberville is by common critical consent the merest stereotype. In what Hardy was later (in his Preface to *Jude*) to call the ‘deadly war waged between flesh and spirit’ Alec is very obviously the representative of the flesh. But few readers can have found him convincing or effective in this capacity. Lacking even the superficial dash of Sergeant Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Alec comes across neither as physically striking, and therefore conceivably attractive to Tess, nor as innately sensual, and therefore, perhaps, a relentless seducer. Notoriously the physical features and the accoutrements which Hardy chooses to stress – the full lips, the curled moustache, the ‘bold rolling eye’, the cigar and the fast gig – are those of the contemporary ‘masher’ or lady-killer, ‘the handsome horsey young buck’ (p. 43). His idiom is similarly stagy: ‘“Upon my honour!” cried he, “there was never before such a beautiful thing in Nature or Art as you look, ‘Cousin’ Tess.”’ (p. 51)

The inference must be that this is a deliberate exercise in stereotyping. Hardy created a ‘villain’ of sketchy psychological interest, because the main emphasis of the story was to fall elsewhere. Like Arabella in *Jude the Obscure*, Alec is no more than a diagrammatic representation of the temptations of the flesh.

Angel Clare, as his very name implies, is similarly to be seen as a representative figure – but a representative of aesthetic or quasi-religious responses:

... he was, in truth, more spiritual than animal; he had himself well in hand, and was singularly free from grossness. Though not cold-natured, he was rather bright than hot – less Byronic than Shelleyan; could love desperately, but with a love more especially inclined to the imaginative and ethereal... (p. 169)

If Alec has at any rate a parodic element of physical presence, Angel has none. How many readers remember that he has a shapely moustache and straw-coloured beard (p. 99)? His mode of speech, pompous and unidiomatic, is if anything less credible and less appealing even than Alec’s. When he first becomes aware of Tess’s existence he exclaims to himself: ‘“What a fresh and virginal

daughter of Nature that milkmaid is!"' (p. 106). His notion of affectionate banter is to say to her: "My Tess has, no doubt, almost as many experiences as that wild convolvulus out there on the garden hedge, that opened itself this morning for the first time" (p. 155). In her dealings with these two-dimensional lovers Hardy's heroine can have only restricted scope for displays of personality. It follows that at the level of characterisation as conventionally defined *Tess* must be considered a work of limited interest.

The greatness of the novel must be sought elsewhere. It is simple enough to poke fun at moustachioed Alec and wincing Angel, but to do so can be to miss the point. Hardy's concern here is not with personality but with ideas. He is less interested in showing what sort of individual Clare is than in trying to define the nature of the love he feels for Tess. Angel's implausible pronouncements quoted above are there to make the thematic point that he sees her in generalised and idealised terms. His new experience of outdoor living has made him familiar with 'the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night and noon, winds in their different tempers, trees, waters and mists, shades and silences, and voices of inanimate things' (p. 105). These are forces which Hardy repeatedly brings to vivid life in his descriptive passages. For Clare, isolated from his family by reluctant loss of religious faith, they have done much to assuage 'the ache of modernism' (p. 110). He immediately feels that Tess, this 'daughter of nature', epitomises the beauty and innocence of his adopted way of life. That reaction is central to his love for her.

Certainly he fails Tess when she confesses her past to him, and certainly that failure illustrates a radical inconsistency and hypocrisy in Victorian moral attitudes. But the less obvious point is the more interesting one, and is more deeply rooted in the text at large. Repeatedly Hardy shows that Angel's feelings for Tess are determined by the context in which he comes to know her. For example, he regularly sees her at dawn, when they go milking:

It was then, as has been said, that she impressed him most deeply. She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them.

'Call me Tess,' she would say askance; and he did. (p. 115)

The issue concerned is central to the novel. When Tess is pregnant she tends to read into the landscape comments on her personal misfortunes:

At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were. (p. 75)

In other words things are what we perceive, or believe, them to be. For Angel Clare, Tess *becomes* a goddess or 'a visionary essence of woman'. Consequently his rejection of her on their wedding night is more complex and more interesting than a demonstration of sexual double standards – even though it includes such a demonstration. When Clare says: 'You were one person; now you are another' and '... the woman I have been loving is not you' (p. 200) he means what he says. Tess herself has no difficulty in understanding him. The second phrase recalls her own 'apprehensive foreboding'. Soon after the wedding she had thought to herself: '... she you love is not my real self, but one in my image' (p. 189). Tess's feelings for Clare, after all, are rather similar in kind: 'he was ... godlike in her eyes' (p. 159).

Indeed throughout the novel Hardy has been at pains to show that human beings *in general* are prone to idealise, to think and feel beyond the limits of physical fact. The drinkers at Rolliver's, for example, reach a pleasing state of elevation:

... their souls expanded beyond their skins, and spread their personalities warmly through the room. In this process the chamber and its furniture grew more and more dignified and luxurious; the shawl hanging at the window took upon itself the richness of tapestry; the brass handles of the chest of drawers were as golden knockers; and the carved bedposts seemed to have some kinship with the magnificent pillars of Solomon's temple. (p. 20)

Some of the visitors to Trantridge who have 'partaken too freely' enjoy a similar sense of exaltation, described by Hardy again with affectionate irony, but also with delicacy and beauty:

They followed the road with a sensation that they were soaring along in a supporting medium, possessed of original and profound thoughts, themselves and surrounding nature forming an organism of which all the parts harmoniously and joyously interpenetrated each other. They were as sublime as the moon and stars above them, and the moon and stars were as ardent as they. (p. 57)

When dancing in the dimly lit outhouse these revellers looked like

satyrs, nymphs, Pans, Syrinxes, but when they came out for air Tess saw them differently: 'the haze no longer veiling their features, the demigods resolved themselves into the homely personalities of her own next-door neighbours' (p. 55). Though Tess herself seems a goddess to Angel at dawn, she soon undergoes a similar metamorphosis: 'Then it would grow lighter, and her features would become simply feminine; they had changed from those of a divinity who could confer bliss to those of a being who craved it' (p. 115).

Hardy shows, in such descriptions, his understanding of the human tendency to idealise, to exalt a person or object through association of various kinds. More than that, he himself knowingly, even ostentatiously, partakes of this tendency in the very grain of his descriptions. He can write about a fieldwoman becoming 'part and parcel of outdoor nature': 'she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it' (p. 77). Or again: 'Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape . . . ' (p. 246). The implied message is that if Clare has misunderstood Tess it is largely through a mode of romanticism to which we are all prone. Man cannot have, and would not want, an objective eye. Our instinctive response to the beauties of nature inescapably shapes and colours our sexual feelings. Hardy's comments on Victorian morality in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* naturally lose a good deal of their force a hundred years later, when the moral landscape is so greatly altered. What he says in a larger diagnostic sense about our self-bewildering enhancements of sexual love retains all its original freshness and relevance.

II

The interplay between realism and modernism also characterises the copious passages of description in the novel. It comes naturally to Hardy to be circumstantial. His time-scheme is carefully worked out in terms of months, years and seasons. Locations and distances are defined: when Tess travels, as she so often does, we know how far she has to go. In this literal vein Hardy offers the social historian rich material. For example, there are numerous descriptions of physical labour – reaping, threshing, milking, swede-hacking – and numerous descriptions of clothes:

The women . . . wore drawn cotton bonnets with great flapping curtains to keep off the sun, and gloves to prevent their hands being wounded by the stubble. (p. 77)

... a fieldwoman pure and simple, in winter guise; a grey serge cape, a red woollen cravat, a stuff skirt covered by a whitey-brown rough wrapper, and buff-leather gloves. (p. 246)

Hardy himself, in his General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912, drew attention to his own concern to get such details right:

... if these country customs and vocations, obsolete and obsolescent, had been detailed wrongly, nobody would have discovered such errors to the end of Time. Yet I have instituted inquiries to correct tricks of memory, and striven against temptations to exaggerate, in order to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of a vanishing life.

In doing so, however, he deploys the documentary detail in such a way as to derive from it a variety of 'modernist' effects of patterning, association and metaphor. The gloves mentioned in the last two quotations from the text come to recall the gauntlets worn by Tess's 'mailed ancestors' – particularly when she uses one to strike Alec across the face (p. 290). On a previous occasion he has tried to take her hand, but 'the buff-glove was on it, and he seized only the rough leather fingers which did not express the life or shape of those within' (p. 278). She withdraws her hand, leaving him grasping the glove. The detail provides a compact metaphor for the seduction which gave him access to her body, but not to her mind or spirit. When Tess first sees Angel Clare at Talbothays she notices that 'Under his linen milking-pinner he wore a dark velveteen jacket, cord breeches and gaiters, and a starched white shirt' (p. 99). His very clothes suggest a divided personality, the Victorian gentleman imperfectly disguised as a farmer. Later Tess herself is to be similarly characterised when she is shown wearing 'a gown bleached by many washings, with a short black jacket over it, the effect of the whole being that of a wedding and funeral guest in one' (p. 305). Alec has tracked her down in Marlott, and she is indeed in the unhappy interlude between her marriage and her premature death.

The work-scenes in the novel are made comparably suggestive. As harvesting proceeds:

Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, and of the doom that awaited them later in the day when, their covert shrinking to a more and more horrible narrowness, they were huddled together, friends and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper, and

they were every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the harvesters. (p. 77)

Like these animals, like the pheasants whom she puts out of their misery (p. 244), Tess is to be hunted down, attacked, destroyed. The threshing scene (Chapter xlvii) also functions partly as a metaphor. The incessant, sickening, exhausting work exacted by the machine becomes a means of expressing the endless harassment to which Tess has been subject. Appropriately, when there is a break in the labour Alec is immediately on hand to renew his advances.

Two aspects of Hardy's handling of metaphor are particularly noteworthy. One is that his realist backgrounds are so rich in colour, weather, labour, plants, animals, utensils, 'stuff' of all kinds, that potentially metaphorical material is always to hand. Although he will occasionally impose a symbolic analogy on his narrative – as when he uses Stonehenge to underline the point that Tess is a sacrificial victim – his mode of associative suggestion is usually effortless and unobtrusive.

The second point is a more fundamental one. For most Modernist writers – including D. H. Lawrence, who learned a great deal from Hardy – the metaphorical material, for all its potential vividness, is a subordinate aspect of fiction, serving to illuminate a situation or characterisation unambiguously in the foreground. With Hardy the case can be very different. The doomed snakes, rats and pheasants, the dying Prince, pierced through the breast, are not merely invoked to dramatise Tess's fate. These creatures are victims in their own right: her plight and theirs together illustrate the cruelty of existence. Hardy is suggesting not merely that the misfortunes of animals and humans are analogous but that they are essentially the same.

His copious similes convey a comparable implication. Natural phenomena are depicted as partaking of one another. Cows have teats 'as hard as carrots' (p. 107); Tess sees 'a monstrous pumpkin-like moon' (p. 156); when she is working on the family allotment 'Jupiter hung like a full-blown jonquil' (p. 305). In each of these cases there are, additional to the immediate comparison, subordinate similarities – concerning, for example, fecundity, ripeness, fullness, fragility. Given the general metaphorical context thus created, it seems unsurprising that Hardy should bring his heroine into comparison with a bird, a cat, a snake, a flower, a berry, a mushroom. Human beings are shown implicitly to be part of the natural environment and subject to its laws. So it comes about that on a fine spring day 'the stir of germination . . . moved her, as it moved the

wild animals' (p. 88). The formulation is a tautology rather than a simile, as is a related statement on the same page: 'some spirit within her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs'. Later Hardy refers to 'The "appetite for joy" which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed . . . ' (p. 167). The tragedy of Tess and Angel is not merely an accidental drama of individualities: 'All the while they were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale' (p. 114). Hardy the realist tell his story, but Hardy the modernist and poet is offering an account of underlying patterns and forces, a diagnosis of the very workings of the world: 'So do flux and reflux – the rhythm of change – alternate and persist in everything under the sky' (p. 308).

III

This singularity of vision demands an unusual kind of reader response. In most novels the memorable episodes are likely to be those generating interaction between two or more characters. Hardy's great scenes often depict a single individual involved in a landscape. His best critics, perceiving this emphasis instinctively, have tended to focus on such incidents. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* features probably the most discussed passage of this type in the whole of Hardy's fiction: the scene in which Tess listens to Angel playing the harp:

The outskirts of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells – weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin; thus she drew quite near to Clare, still unobserved of him.

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes. The

floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's sensibility. Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close for intentness, and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound. (p. 108-9)

To appreciate the richness and complexity of such an episode it is necessary to be at home with Hardy's unique blend of dense realism and abstract suggestion. Two or three factors immediately stand out. The succulent sensuality is synaesthetic in its effect. All our senses are alerted and perplexed as the sound of the harp fuses with the colours and the scents and the damp stickiness of the garden. But at first glance it is hard to decide whether the agreeable or the disagreeable elements predominate – whether the bright colours and breeze-like harmonies are more prominent than the slug-slime and the 'offensive smells'.

In a sharply patterned novel this scene is specifically a counterpart to the two-chapter sequence – omitted from the serial version – which concludes with the seduction in *The Chase*. There Tess yielded to Alec. Here, in an entirely different sense, she yields to Angel Clare. The summer-evening 'atmosphere', the music, the references to mist, to pollen, to slime, to tears are some of the links between the two passages. Curiously the final scene in *The Chase* is stylistically subdued, distanced, even decorous, while the paragraphs quoted here are so steeped in erotic innuendo as virtually to constitute a metaphor for the sexual act. The irony is calculated. In the earlier, peaceful scene Alec arrives to impose his sexual will on the sleeping Tess. In the garden episode there are the frankest possible hints of sexual arousal – but the author is at pains to assert that this is not the point. 'Tess was conscious of neither time nor space': hers is a spiritual experience, essentially to do with love rather than with physical desire. It is characteristic of Hardy that he can impose this emphasis while still making it clear that the two sensations are linked – the sexual response can engender, or help to engender, the spiritual one, very roughly as the 'juicy grass' can somehow send up 'mists of pollen' which seem to be Angel's 'notes made visible'. The point cannot be elucidated without some unpacking of the metaphor, but even preliminary moves of this kind involve an over-simplification. Hardy uses the language of metaphor because it is richer and subtler than literal explanation. It was probably chiefly for that reason that he was eventually to turn from fiction to poetry.

IV

For the most part the two methodologies in *Tess* – the realist and the modernist – sit very comfortably together. Talbothays, for example, is both a defined topographical space, with its own climate, vegetation, work, way of life, and a region of the mind or spirit, the domain of love and happiness. Tess's journey to it is both a physical journey, measurable in hours and miles, and a transition from a defeated to a hopeful mode of being.

But the extent to which the novel has been read in terms of social and gender issues does suggest that the two approaches can conflict, and that when they do the realist mode is felt to predominate. Tess herself is presented so intimately as a girl of particular temperament and appearance, who weeps, laughs, yawns, sleeps, blushes, bleeds, perspires, that it seems natural to repond to her story as that of an individual, and wonder whether she would indeed have been attracted to Alec, or capable of murdering him. As Hardy the storyteller draws us into his narrative he makes us literal minded. Many a reader will conclude the novel wondering whether Angel Clare will 'really' marry Liza-Lu. It is a great thing for a writer to be able to involve us, in this fashion, in the 'truth' of an imagined story. Yet here the price paid for such involvement is too high if we are deflected from an appreciation of Hardy's more complex and comprehensive enterprise – that of showing how curiously and confusingly compounded are our sexual and our aesthetic instincts, our physical and our emotional energies, our romantic love for individuals and our transforming responses to the natural world.

MICHAEL IRWIN
Professor of English Literature
University of Kent at Canterbury

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy*, Cambridge University Press, 1978
- Penny Boumelha, *Thomas and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, Harvester, 1982
- J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye*, Oxford, 1986
- Jean Brooks, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure*, Cornell University, 1971
- Ian Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction*, Faber, 1974
- Joan Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts*, Macmillan, 1979
- Irving Howe, *Thomas Hardy*, Macmillan, 1967
- J. T. Laird, *The Shaping of 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'*, Oxford, 1975
- J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*, Harvard, 1970
- Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*, Bodley Head, 1971
- Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, Routledge, 1988
- Roy Morrell, *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way*, University of Malaya, 1965
- Rosemary Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist*, Macmillan, 1981

Two useful anthologies of essays on the novel are:

- Albert J. LaValley (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'*, Prentice-Hall, 1969
- Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Macmillan, 1993

An interesting counterweight to some of the works cited here is Robert Schweik's 'Less than Faithfully Presented: Fictions in Modern Commentaries on Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', in Charles P. C. Pettit (ed.), *Reading Thomas Hardy*, Macmillan, 1998.